

6. EASTERN LIMIT OF THE HIMALAYAN IBEX *CAPRA IBEX SIBIRICA* PALLAS

There seems to be some difference of opinion among naturalists and sportsmen as to the eastern limit of the Himalayan Ibex *Capra sibirica*. Some say that it is found up to Garhwal and Kumaon, while others say that its eastern limit is the Sutlej River. In this respect I quote the two authorities on the subject, R. Lydekker and Major G. Burrard. The former in his book *THE GAME ANIMALS OF INDIA* etc. says: 'The Sakin or Asiatic Ibex, *Capra sibirica*, inhabits the mountains of central Asia, the Tien Shan, and the Altai to the Himalaya (exclusive of the Pir Panjal), and from the neighbourhood of Herat to the River Sutlej. The species is not found between the Sutlej and sources of the Ganges.'

Burrard in his book *BIG GAME HUNTING IN THE HIMALAYAS AND TIBET* has gone more deeply into this subject, and throws some light on the difference of opinion among sportsmen. He says: 'Although the ibex is undoubtedly the best known of all the game animals of the Himalayas, more mistakes have been made in explaining its distribution than in the case of any of its less known friends and relations. In more than one authoritative work it is described as an inhabitant of Tibet, and is mentioned as being found in the neighbourhood of Lhasa. Again it has been repeatedly declared that it is found in "Kumaon as far east as Gangotri" and the sources of the Ganges—quite regardless of the fact that Gangotri is not in the British Province of Kumaon at all, but in the protected State of Tehri Garhwal with the State of British Garhwal in between. It is difficult to understand how these mistakes arose, but I conclude they were made in the course of the collection of hearsay evidence on which some famous scientific naturalists based some of their classification. They provide an excellent example of the errors which can be made through insufficient knowledge of geography and no personal acquaintance with the actual haunts of game. The late General Kinloch, who was always so accurate in all his descriptions of the habitats of animals, never made any such error; nor did the older sportsmen, such as General Markham and Wilson ("Mountaineer"), who hunted and shot in the forties. The mistakes would accordingly seem to be of a more recent date and are all the more inexcusable. The distribution of the ibex, as far as the Himalayas are concerned, is clearly shown on the accompanying sketch. The River Sutlej is its eastern boundary and it is never under any circumstances found on the left bank of this river.'

It will be seen from the above two extracts that both these authorities agree that the ibex is never found to the east of the River Sutlej. Lt.-Col. C. H. Stockley in his book *STALKING IN THE HIMALAYAS AND NORTHERN INDIA* also subscribes to this view. It would therefore, be interesting to know as to who the sportsmen-naturalists were who said that the ibex was found to the east of the Sutlej also. Did these people actually see the ibex east of the Sutlej, or did they base their statements merely on hearsay? I wish Burrard or others concerned could throw more light on the subject. It would also be interesting to know as to why the ibex were not able to cross the Sutlej and extend their habitat to its east side. Is it due to the fact that the river is not fordable, even during winter? What about the snow bridges which must form during the winter over the higher reaches of the river, which would allow the ibex to pass over to its east bank? Is the terrain and the food found to the east of the Sutlej not suited for ibex? Since I have never had the fortune so far to visit the Sutlej area, I am unable to give my views on the above questions.

All the relevant books I know of were published well before the Second World War and it would be interesting to know what the latest position is in the area. One day in 1953 I happened to see a mounted ibex head at a taxidermist's shop in Dehra Dun. On enquiry I was told that it had been shot by a sportsman somewhere in Garhwal. The taxidermist, however, was not sure about this. Unfortunately at that time, as I did not know much about the habitat of ibex, I did not ask for further particulars. It makes me now suspect, however, that ibex may have crossed over the Sutlej and may now be found on its eastern side. There is no doubt that the head was that of an ibex, and with my subsequent experience of this animal in Ladakh I can now say that it must have been about 32 inches in length.

The object of this note is to elicit correct and, if possible, latest information on the subject of the eastern limit of the Himalayan Ibex. I would therefore be grateful if any sportsman or naturalist who has been in the area under consideration would kindly offer his comments or information on this controversial subject, through the *Journal*. I wonder if the Zoological Survey of India has some definite and latest information on the subject. If not, could they please have this subject investigated, when they next send an expedition to the Sutlej area or in Garhwal?

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